MILITARY DECEPTION AND STRATEGIC CULTURE: THE SOVIET UNION AND RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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This article explores the influence of Soviet and Russian strategic cultures on the conduct of military deception operations, one facet of information warfare. Our thesis is that a subcomponent of strategic culture in the Soviet Union and Russia from 1941 to 2017, termed hierarchical culture, enabled the conduct of cohesive deception operations. Our case studies are World War II, the Soviet-Afghan War, and the recent conflict in Ukraine. For each conflict, we use contemporneous primary documents to verify the existence of hierarchical culture and determine the cohesion of millitary deception operations based on descriptions of their level of success. Our findings indicate that hierarchical culture may have aided in development and conduct, but did not guarantee attempted military deception operations would be cohesive.. This work shows that in the context of foreign policy toward Russia, not only does one need to consider advances in high technology for traditional military applications but also innovations and uses below the threshold of declared war.

Much has been written regarding the role of information and communications technologies, i.e., cyber and other emerging technologies, in the context of Russian military advances.[1] Russia's weaponization of information has similarly prompted a great deal of literature.[2] A missing connection is the role strategic culture plays in the success of Russian military deception operations. This article seeks to help bridge that gap.

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1. Tor Bukkvoll, "Iron Cannot Fight –The Role of Technology in Current Russian Military Theory." *Journal of Strategic Studies,* Vol. 34, No. 5 (October 2011), pp. 681–706, doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2011.601094; Alexander Klimburg, "Mobilising Cyber Power," *Survival*, Vol. 53:1 (Janurary 2011), pp. 41–60, doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2011.555595; James J. Wirtz, "Cyber War and Strategic Culture: The Russian Integration of Cyber Power Into Grand Strategy," in Kenneth Geers, ed., *Cyber War in Perspective: Russian Aggression Against Ukraine* (Tallinn, Estonia: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence Publications, 2015); Michael Connell and Sarah Vogler, R*ussia's Approach to Cyber Warfare* (Arlington, V.A.: Center for Naval Analysis, 2017); Benjamin Jensen, Brandon Valeriano, and Ryan Maness, "Fancy bears and digital trolls: Cyber strategy with a Russian twist," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 42:2, (January 2019), pp. 212–234, doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2018.1559152; Mason Shuya, "Russian Cyber Aggression and the New Cold War," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (April 2018), pp. 1–18, doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.11.1.1646; Thomas Rid, "Cyber War Will Not Take Place," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35:1, (October 2012), pp. 5–32, doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2011.608939; Tarun Chaudhary, Jenna Jordan, Michael Salomone, and Phil Baxter, "Patchwork of confusion: the cybersecurity coordination problem," *Journal of Cybersecurity*, Vol. 4:1, (December 2018), pp. 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1093/cybsec/tyy005; Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Deterrence and dissuasion in cyberspace," *International Security,* Vol. 41, No. 3 (February 2017), pp. 44–71, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00266; Dmitry Adamsky, "Defense Innovation in Russia: The Current State and Prospects for Revival" *University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation Defense Innovation Briefs*, No. 5 (2014), pp. 1–12; Philip Breedlove and Margaret E. Kosal, *Emerging Technologies and National Security: Russia, NATO, & the European Theater* (Stanford, C.A.: Hoover Institute Governance in an Emerging New World Project, 2019), https://www.hoover.org/research/emerging-technologies-and-national-security-russia-nato-european-theater.

2. Tad A. Schnaufer, "Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-linear War against the West," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 2017), pp. 17–31, doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.1.1538; Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2015),

Information warfare can erode the legitimacy of targeted governments[3] and increase the initiator's options for pursuing its objectives.[4] The following Russian doctrinal definition of information warfare points to these capabilities:

> Confrontation between two or more governments in the information space with the aim of inflicting damage on information systems, processes, and resources of critical importance, and other structures, undermining the political, economic, and social system, and achieving mass psychological indoctrination of the population for destabilization of

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http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1303; David L. Raugh, "Is the Hybrid Threat a True Threat?" *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 2016), pp. 1–13, doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.2.1507; Maria Snegovaya, *Putin's Information War in Ukraine: The Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, Russia Report 1 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, September 2015); Andrew Monaghan, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare," *Parameters*, Vol. 45:4, (Winter 2015), pp. 65–74; Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review,* Vol. 96:1 (Winter 2016), pp. 30–38; Samuel Charap, "The Ghost of Hybrid Warfare," *Survival*, Vol. 57:6 (Winter 2016), pp. 51–58, doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1116147; Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for US Military Strategy*, Advancing Strategic Thought Series (Carlisle, P.A.: United States War College Press, April 2016); Timothy McCulloh and Richard Jonhson, "Hybrid Warfare," (MacDill Air Force Base, F.L.: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2013), pp. 7–17; Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, (Arlington, V.A.: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007); Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia's Asymmetrical Approach to Information Warfare," in Stephen J. Cimbala, ed., *The Russian Military Into the 21st Century* (New York, N.Y.; Routledge, 2013); Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 17:2, (2004), pp. 237–256, doi.org/10.1080/13518040490450529

3. Martin C. Libicki, "The Convergence of Information Warfare," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2017), pp. 49–65; Mason Richey, "Contemporary Russian revisionism: understanding the Kremlin's hybrid warfare and the strategic and tactical deployment of disinformation," *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 16:1 (March 2018), pp. 101–113, doi.org/10.1007/S10308-017-0482-5; Dmitry Adamsky, *Cross-Domain Coercion: the Current Russian Art of Strategy*, Proliferation Papers 54 (Paris, France: Institut Français des Relations Internationales Security Studies Center, November 2015), pp. 26–27;

4. Timothy L. Thomas, "Russian Information Warfare Theory: The Consequences of August 2008," in Stephen J. Blank Richard Weitz, ed., *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow: Essays in Memory of Mary Fitzgerald* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, July 2010), p. 266; Martin C. Libicki, "What Is Information Warfare?" *National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies*, (August 1995), https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a367662.pdf; *Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014,* (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, June 2015); Kier Giles, *The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare*, (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, May 2016), http://www.stratcomcoe.org/next-phase-russian-information-warfare-keir-giles; Rod Thornton "The Changing Nature of Modern Warfare: Responding to Russian Information Warfare," *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 160:4, (September 2015), pp. 40–48, doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2015.1079047; Bret Perry, "Non-Linear Warfare in Ukraine: The Critical Role of Information Operations and Special Operations," *Small Wars Journal*, (August 2015).

> the society and government, to coerce the government into making decisions in the interests of the confronting side.[5]

In order to respond effectively to such a confrontation, decision-makers must have an accurate perception of the confrontation or conflict.

The manipulation of decision-makers' perceptions, termed reflexive control, is a key objective of Russian information warfare. Snegovaya describes reflexive control as causing, "a stronger adversary voluntarily to choose the actions most advantageous to Russian objectives by shaping the adversary's perceptions of the situation decisively."[6] In 1996, Major General Turko, an instructor at Russia's General Staff Academy, claimed,

> The most dangerous manifestation in the tendency to rely on military power relates more to the possible impact of the use of reflexive control by the opposing side through developments in the theory and practice of information war rather than to the direct use of the means of armed combat.[7]

Since that time, Russian military theorists have continued to refine the concept.[8] American joint doctrine on military deception effectively captures the idea of reflexive control:

> Military deception (MILDEC), conducted at strategic, operational, and tactical levels, is defined as being those actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary decision-makers as to friendly military capabilities, intentions, and operations, thereby causing the adversary to take specific actions (or inactions) that will contribute to the accomplishment of the friendly mission.[9]

According to this definition, we will use the term military deception to describe Russian and Soviet operations conducted in the context of an armed conflict to deceive adversary decision-makers regarding troop movements and intentions.

By analyzing the relationship between strategic culture and military deception operations, we hope to contribute a policy-relevant perspective to the literature on Russian information warfare. This work will also further the literature on strategic culture by exploring how it might be operationalized to explain specific outcomes in conflict.

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5. The Russian Ministry of Defense, *Kontseptual'nyye Vzglyadyy na Deyatel'nost' Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Informatsionnom Prostranstve* [Conceptual Views on the Activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the Information Space], 2011, p. 5, http://ens.mil.ru/files/morf/Strategy.doc.
6. Snegovaya, *Putin's Information War in Ukraine: The Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, p. 7.
7. Ibid., p. 9
8. Timothy Thomas, "Russia's reflexive control theory and the military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2 (2004), p. 237, doi.org/10.1080/13518040490450529.
9. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-13.4 Military Deception,* 2012 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff) p. vii.

Information Warfare and Centralization

Soviet training manuals trace the 'science' of disinformation back to 1787 with the construction of mock villages in the Ukrainian countryside. These "Potemkin" villages were intended to give an impression of prosperity as Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, passed through the region..[10] Traveling throughout Russia in the 1700s, the French Marquis de Custine noted in his journals, "Russian despotism not only counts ideas and sentiments for nothing but remakes facts; it wages war on evidence and triumphs in the battle."[11] This observation remains relevant in light of Russia's current attempts to manipulate democratic elections abroad and mask its military actions in neighboring states.

Currently, Russian military deception operations are employed along with non-military means to compete with the West in the grey zone.[12] Grey zone activity is defined by Brands as "coercive and aggressive in nature," but "designed to remain below the threshold of conventional military conflict and open interstate war."[13] Through the manipulation of information Russia can pursue objectives traditionally obtained through military conflict while avoiding the costs of war. According to Vladimir Slipchenko, a Russian military academic, "Information has become a destructive weapon just like a bayonet, bullet or projectile."[14] The effecitive use of this weapon allows changes to the status quo to be made incrementally instead of violently.[15]

A deception is built around a "kernel of truth."[16] This forms the basis for contorting a situation into a false reality that seems plausible to a target group. Ideally this false reality would dominate the target group's perception, leading them to make decisions that promote the desginers objectives and not their own.[17] However, in order for the false reality to remain

10. Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Disinformation* (Washington, D.C.: WND Books, 2013)
11. Marquis de Custine, *Journey for Our Time: The Russian Journals of Marquis de Custine* (Washington, D.C: Gateway Editions, 1987), p. 14. Found in Pacepa, *Disinformation,* p. 37.
12. T. S. Allen and A. J. Moore, "Victory without Casualties: Russia's Information Operations," *Parameters*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2018), pp. 59–71; Philip M. Breedlove, "Russian Interference in Domestic Politics," Prepared statement for HASC Hearing on "State and Non-State Actor Influence Operations: Recommendations for U.S. National Security," 21 March 2018, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180321/108048/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-BreedloveP-20180321.pdf.
13. Hal Brands, *Paradoxes of the Gray Zone*, (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 2016), https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/02/paradoxes-gray-zone/.
14. Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareev and Vladimir Slipchenko, *Future War* (Fort Leavenworth, K.S.: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2007), p. 33. Quoted in Allen, T. S., and A. J. Moore, "Victory without Casualties: Russia's Information Operations," pp. 59–71.
15. Brands, "Paradoxes of the Gray Zone."
16. Pacepa, *Disinformation*, p. 43.
17. This process is referred to as reflexive control. Maria Snegovaya explains, "Reflexive control causes a stronger adversary voluntarily to choose the actions most advantageous to Russian objectives by shaping the adversary's perceptions of the situation decisively." Snegovaya, *Putin's Information War in Ukraine: The Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, p. 7.

credible, interdependent tactical, operational, and strategic levels must be coordinated to avoid contradiction.[18]

Coordination requires a measure of communication and centralization of decision making. Though the proliferation of information technologies makes constant communication increasingly attainable, centralization has historically taken precedent and will likely to continue to do so. General Zhukov, responsible for the 1st Belorussian Front in World War II, describes how centralization led to successful military deception operations:

> In the Great Patriotic War operational *maskirovka*[19] produced good results, because it was planned, prepared, and carried out on the basis of the centralized direction of the STAVKA.[20] The principle of organizing operational *maskirovka* remained the most important and was unswervingly fulfilled in all operations on all fronts.[21]

Centralization enabled effective military deception operations in the 2014 annexation of Crimea, just as in WWII. Igor Panarin, Russian scholar and advisor to the Kremlin, attributes the success of these operations to "the personal leadership of Vladimir Putin, who centralized the control of all the key political, economic, financial, military, intelligence, and information tools."[22] Despite change in personal leadership, form of government, operational context, and available technologies, in the intervening seventry years between these conflicts, centralization has remained a key factor in deception

The 4D approach, employed in disinformation campaigns not strictly limited to the military sphere, aims to dismiss, distort, distract, and dismay.[23] It follows directly from reflexive control.[24] Giles describes three main developmental phases in attaining capabilities to effectively pursue this approach after 1991. The first phase occurred in 1999 with the Second Chechen War. The Chechens effectively overcame Russian narratives, despite Russian control of traditional media, through utilization of the internet. This encouraged the Russian government to treat the internet as a threat and destabilizing factor, while its security services sought ways to employ it. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War brought about the second developmental phase. Although it was not clear whether Russia or Georgia won the information war, there was a marked discrepancy

18. Morgan Maier, *A Little Masquerade: Russia's Evolving Employment of Maskirovka*, Technical Report, (Leavenworth, K.S: US Army School for Advanced Military Studies Fort Leavenworth United States, May 2016), p. 5, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1022096.pdf.
19. Disinformation measures executed at the operational level.
20. STAVKA is the Headquarters of the Commander in Chief.
21. David Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (New York, NY: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1989), p. 488.
22. *Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014,* p. 47.
23. John B. Emerson, "Exposing Russian Disinformation," *Atlantic Council*, June 29, 2015, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/exposing-russian-disinformation.
24. Snegovaya, *Putin's Information War in Ukraine: The Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, p. 13.

between the efficacy of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili addressing target audiences in their own language, and the belated press conferences held by the Russian Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Anatoliy Nogovitsyn, exclusively in Russian.[25] This led to discussions around the potential creation of 'Information Troops.' These would include "hackers, journalists, specialists in strategic communications and psychological operations, and, crucially, linguists..."[26] However, the initiative for the creation of these troops ceased around 2011 or 2012,[27] coinciding with the beginning of the third phase and protests over Russia's elections. Several of the capabilities originally intended for Information Troops were instead realized by the creation of a 'Kremlin troll army,' which employed human capabilities to influence online discourse. Automated systems were also employed, but found to be insufficient when operating alone. Giles claims that by 2014, "the media element of Russian information campaigns displayed close coordination of messaging with centralized direction, as well as an impressive range of alternative outlets to address all sectors of the target audience."[28]

Galeotti presents the conduct of present disinformation campaigns as a much more haphazard endeavor than Giles does. According to Galeotti, they are composed of broad-based initiatives supporting a primary narrative provided by the presidential administration through media organs and other channels into the public information space. A large number of disjointed, sometimes contradictory, narratives and ideas influence the target group's perception of reality. Galeotti writes that:

> What emerges from all kinds of different sources, open and closed, is that Putin himself tends not to be an originator; he would much rather arbitrate between rival approaches, pick from a menu of options, or give people enough rope to hang or lift themselves.[29]

Even larger campaigns that require agency coordination or pose political risk to Russia can have humble beginnings either with a certain actor on the ground or through capitalizing on an unprompted opportunity. As these develop they tend to require approval from higher up the chain of command. Galeotti's description is useful for explaining some viewers repeated contact

25. Keir Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, Russia and Eurasia Programme Research Paper (London, U.K.: Chatham House, March 2016), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf.
26. Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power,* p. 29.
27. Ulrik Franke, *War by non-military means: Understanding Russian information warfare*, (Stockholm, Sweden: Försvarsanalys, Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI), March 2015).
28. Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power,* p. 30.
29. Mark Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe*, Policy Brief (Berlin, Germany: European Council of Foreign Relations, September 2017), p. 8.

with Russian propaganda from seemingly varied sources.[30] The level of centralization in the conduct of a disinformation campaign likely varies between the descriptions provided by Galeotti and Giles based on the context and objectives of the campaign.

Disinformation campaigns continue to evolve in response to lessons learned from conflict and past mistakes. Based on coordination missteps in recent disinformation campaigns, Snegovaya argues that to improve Russia "…would have to centralize its information techniques and increase its coordination among different propaganda centers."[31] This suggests that future Russian disinformation campaigns will continue to be characterized by centralization.

From Strategic to Hierarchical Culture

In the late 1970's, Jack Snyder defined strategic culture as the "...sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation..."[32] Some first-generation literature on strategic culture borrowed from Snyder's work and tended toward a broad amorphous conception of strategic culture. Scholars included factors such as, "Technology, geography, organizational culture and traditions, historical strategic practices, political culture, national character, political psychology, ideology, and the international system structure."[33] As Johnston points out, such a broad conception of strategic culture hardly allows for any other explanation of behavior. This is particularly true when behavior is included in the definition of strategic culture. The second generation of literature introduced the instrumentality of strategic culture. These scholars put forward the idea that strategic culture can be employed by decision-makers to justify actions. This led to the possibility of replacing the impact of strategic culture on behavior with the interests of elites, but raised questions as to whether elites can separate themselves from the strategic culture in which they are socialized. In the third generation of literature, scholars solved the problem of tautology by ommiting behavoir from their definitions of strategic culture. These often opted to treat behavior as the dependent variable,[34] Gray writes that "'cultural thought-ways' of friends, foes, and, of course, ourselves, can have a directive or a shaping effect upon decisions and behavior."[35]

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30. Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian "Firehouse of Falsehood" Propaganda Model*, Perspective (Santa Monica, C.A.: Rand Corporation, 2016), https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html.
31. Snegovaya, *Putin's Information War in Ukraine: The Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare*, p. 20.
32. Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, Reports (Santa Monica, C.A.: Rand Corporation, 1977), p. 8, https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R2154.html.
33. Alastair Iain Johnston,. "Thinking about Strategic Culture." *International Security,* Vol. 19, No. 4 (Spring 1995), p. 37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539119.
34. Ibid., p. 41.
35. Colin S. Gray, "Out of the Wilderness: Prime Time for Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy,* Vol. 26:1 (2007), p. 26, doi.org/10.1080/01495930701271478 .

A prominent explanation of the mechanism by which culture affects behavior is that it shapes the availability and appeal of choices. Johnston claims strategic culture is, "an ideational milieu that limits behavioral choices."[36] Elkins and Simeon similarly argue that the explanatory power of culture is, "primarily restricted to setting the agenda."[37] March and Olsen advance these arguments by introducing a 'logic of appropriateness.' This logic is essentially driven by three questions: "What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this?"[38] The answers are informed by institutional practices defining appropriate behavior in a given circumstance.

Information transfer is one organizational activity conducted according to culturally informed behavioral characteristics and constraints. By categorizing cultures according to their individualism or collectivism and horizontalness or verticalness R. S. Bhagat and co-authors find that:

> ...communication flows differently when the society is vertical (primarily from the top to the bottom) than when it is horizontal (communication flows both ways-from top to bottom and from bottom to top).[39]

They further conclude that individuals in vertical collectivist cultures tend to be more receptive to information from authorities than individuals in horizontally aligned cultures.[40] This is particularly relevent in terms of conducting military deception operations. The effective implementation of centralization to ensure top-down communication and coordination at all levels is influenced by culture.

The impact of culture on behavior and information transfer is played out in Soviet and Russian polical and military organizations according to strategic culture. Synder writes that:

> "Individuals are socialized into a distinctly Soviet mode of strategic thinking. As a result of this socialization process, a set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns

36. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 36.
37. David J. Elkins and Richard E. B. Simeon, "A Cause in Search of its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?" *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 11, No. 2 (January 1979), pp. 130–31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/421752. Quoted in Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*.
38. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *The Logic of Appropriateness,* Advanced Research on the Europeanisation of the Nation-State Working Papers (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo, December 2003), p. 4, dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548453.003.0034.
39. Rabi S. Bhagat, Ben L. Kedia, Paula D. Harveston and Harry C. Triandis, "Cultural Variations In The Cross-Border Transfer Of Organizational Knowledge: An Integrative Framework," *Academy of Management Review,* Vol. 27, No. 2 (April 2002), p. 209, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4134352.
47. Ibid., p. 213.

> with regard to nuclear strategy has achieved a state of semipermanence that places them on the level of 'culture' rather than mere 'policy.'"[41]

Russian and Soviet strategic culture has shown remarkable tenacity in the midst of societal upheaval, political restructuring, and changes in capabilities.[42] According to Covington:

> "Few military organizations can lose fundamental capabilities like personnel, weapons, infrastructure, defense economy, territory, political support, and political cohesion over more than a decade, yet retain their strategic organizational culture. This is testimony to the deeply rooted nature of the Russian military's traditional culture of strategic thought."[43]

Covington describes efforts by the Russian military leadership to instill this culture of strategic thought in its officer corps. Under Putin it has also begun to pervade the government, paving the way for close cooperation in war.[44]

Consistency in strategic culture enables Russia to bring all national resources to bear in a conflict. Writing in 1888, British Colonel Frederick Maurice attributed Russia's enduring position as a great military power to its complete devotion of national resources to war and large population.[45] This whole of country approach is meant to deter and manage conflict and crisis on a border perceieved as unstable. The Russian strategic framework primarily concerns four regions: the Arctic, Baltic, Black Seas and the East. Should a conflict arise in any of these regions, it would be met with forces quickly moved from other areas supported by the full capabilities of the country. To achieve this ideal, "...strategic operations must be executed across ground-air-space domains, at tactical-operational-strategic scales, and with ambiguous conventional-nuclear means..."[46] Taking coordinated initiative at the outset of the conflict is encouraged by a belief that the initial period will determine the nature of the rest of the conflict.
The formative years of Soviet strategic culture occurred at a time when the Soviet Union felt it was strategically inferior.[47] Covington shows how feelings of geo-strategic and technological vulnerability persist and lead the Russian military to expect surprise. He states, "There is a striking duality in Russian strategic culture about war with seeking strategic advantage and exploiting political and military opportunity coexisting alongside perceptions of strategic

41. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, p. v.
42. Stephen Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought,* Defense and Intelligence Projects Paper (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, October 2016), p. 39.
43. Ibid., p. 39.
44. Ibid., p. 3.
45. Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War,* p. 36.
46. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought,* p. 35.
47. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, p. 25.

vulnerability and fears for surprise."[48] Donnelly traces the fear of surprise, and determination that it should not happen again, back to the Soviet experience at the onset of World War II wherein their forces were caught unprepared at the beginning of the war with disastrous consequences. He claims that "readiness to fight" and pre-emption of an attack are fundamental to Soviet strategic thinking. [49]

In addition to the emphasis on rapid and coordinated response, a belief that wars are won at the operational level encouraged centralization and concentration of authority at the operational and strategic levels. In the Red Army, commanders needed subordinate units to respond faithfully to orders, and initiative below the Army level was not usually expected.[50] Adamsky writes the Soviet military was, "educated in adherence to books solutions, detailed planning of operations, centralization, and limited decision making permitted to junior officers."[51] The freedom of tactical commanders was purposely curtailed in order to prevent them from upending senior commander's plans. Even as tactical commanders' mental flexibility improved through the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of initiative on the tactical level remained difficult for the Soviet military to accept.

The hierarchical aspect of Russian military strategic culture reflects Russian national culture. According to Russian legend, the nation was established when Slavic tribes plagued by infighting asked Norse rulers to reign over them. Donnelly writes, "... the sentiment evoked in this legendary invitation - that of a fruitful but disorganised people needing and indeed welcoming firm rule - has persisted in Russian attitudes right up to the present day"[52] Liakhovsky similarly emphasizes the longevity of this cultural characteristic:

> Russia is a country of masters and slaves because each master is in turn another's slave according to an established hierarchy. For centuries regimes, rulers, dynasties, and ideologies changed but the principle of slaves and masters remained unchanged.[53]

Billington provides a compelling example of this when he describes Stalin lying in the mausoleum in Red Square:

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48. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought,* p. 13.
49. Christopher Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War* (Alexandria, V.A.: Jane's Information Group, 1988), p. 80.
50. Ibid., p. 85.
51. Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*, (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 53.
52. Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War,* p. 36.
53. Aleksandr Antonovich Lyakhovskiy, *Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1979*, trans., Gary Goldberg and Artemy Kalinovsky, Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 51 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007), p. 22.

> It was an awesome reminder of the carefully cultivated myth of infallibility—the idea that, however absurd Soviet policy may have seemed to those on the front lines, there was always an omniscient leader at the command post: a "magic citadel" within the Kremlin inviolable to assault from ordinary experience and common-sense doubts.[54]

Wendi Adair and co-authors agree with these historical narratives, finding that Russian national culture tends to express norms of obedience to a strict hierarchy as well as a desire for order, stability, and strong leaders.[55]

Adamsky describes how this principal affected the organization of society, "Russian-Soviet collectivistic society was organized hierarchically, and the collective mentality emphasized group-centered relations."[56] He further writes that Soviet and Russian commanders fully exploited this cultural characteristic to build their forces by, "brutally enforcing discipline, demanding extremes of self-sacrifice even in completely futile engagements, and insisting on subservience of the mind, body, and spirit..."[57] Hierarchical culture is fundamental to Soviet and Russian military strategic culture.

The nature of strategic culture is unlikely to change quickly despite rapidly evolving circumstances. Snyder describes the incremental process of change in strategic cultures: "Individuals are socialized into a mode of strategic discourse and acquire a fund of strategic concepts that evolve only marginally over time."[58] If change comes on account of shifts in the strategic environment, Snyder argues, it will be mediated through the preexisting lens strategic culture provides.

Given the long-standing prominence of hierarchical culture in Russian and Soviet strategic culture, we assert that hierarchical culture shapes information transfer in Soviet and Russian political-military organizations. Therefore, these organizations have a tendency to transfer information primary from the top to the bottom of the organization and for subordinates to be more receptive to information coming from authorities.[59] These culturally informed tendencies enable and encourage the centralization necessary for cohesive military deception operations.

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54. James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 542.
55. Wendi Adair, Jeanne Brett, Alain Lempereur, Tetsushi Okumura, Peter Shikhiev, Catherine Tinsley, and Anne Lytle, "Culture and Negotiation Strategy," *Negotiation Journal*, Vol.20:1 (December 2003), p. 92, doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2004.00008.x; William Mishler and John P. Willerton, "The Dynamics of Presidential Popularity in Post-Communist Russia: Cultural Imperative versus Neo-Institutional Choice?" *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (February 2003), pp. 112–115, doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.t01-1-00006.
56. Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel*, p. 39.
57. Ibid., p. 43.
58. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, p. 9.
59. Bhagat, "Cultural Variations In The Cross-Border Transfer Of Organizational Knowledge: An Integrative Framework," pp. 209—212.

Methodology

Hierarchical culture is defined as a subset of strategic culture built on a preference for higher decision thresholds. Its existence is demonstrated in discourse delegitimizing lowering the decision threshold. This measure assumes that discourse accurately represents the beliefs of the discussants and that those beliefs have the potential to shape behavior. References to relative place in the chain-of-command and corresponding decision-making authority are used to determine whether lowering the decision threshold was delegitimized.

The cohesion of a military deception operation is estimated based on the reaction of the target group. This assumes cohesion will result in the creation of a false reality that will provoke a response from the target group, as intended in reflexive control theory. In all case studies, military deception operations were used to create a false reality regarding troop movements and intentions. In order to maintain consistency in measuring cohesion across case studies, only the target's response to a false reality regarding these fundamental aspects of an operation are considered.

We examine the relationship between hierarchical culture and military deception cohesion across three case studies: World War II, the Soviet-Afghan War, and the conflict in Ukraine. These case studies vary personal leadership, type of government, scale of military conflict, type of forces engaged, and available communications technology in order to isolate hierarchical culture as the independent variable. Specific deception operations within each case study were selected on the basis of data availability, or, in the case of those conducted during World War II, to illustrate the development of military deception capability. The limited number of primary documents containing discourse on decision thresholds required using a variety of sources, including memoirs, interviews as reported in online media, and meeting minutes. The discussants in these documents range from members of the Politburo to Russian special operations soldiers.

1941 - 1945: World War II

World War II served to develop the Soviet Union's, and later Russia's, military deception capability and shaped doctrine for decades to come. This development can be divided into four phases.[60] During the first phase, the Soviets experimented with various deception techniques. These included conducting troop movement at night or in unexpected directions, simulating misleading troop concentrations, attacking from the march, and conducting reconnaissance across the entire front. However, due to inexperience and lack of cohesion, these measures achieved little success in affecting adversary reactions.

60. David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War*, *Soviet (Russian) Military Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2006), p. 488.

The formation of operational groups for planning and organizing military deception operations among commanders of all types of arms contributed to improving coordination during the second phase. Experiences from the first phase were also collated into standardized directives used to educate the army on effective deception techniques and organization.[61] This furthered their ability to employ deception at all levels. These changes helped to obscure the Soviet rear from the Germans, allowing them to move units up to the front without immediate detection by German intelligence.[62]

During the third phase, the Soviets assumed the strategic offensive. This offered more potential for deception. Each was adapted to the surrounding terrain and weather. Front commanders were able to regroup armies at will, and directives on military deception from 1943 onward instructed commanders to be innovative and flexible to ward off predictability.[63]

The fourth phase occurred over a contracted front as the Soviets conducted their final offensive against the Germans.[64] This smaller geographic area led to higher concentrations of troops, which limited opportunities for deception. Within this constraint, the Soviets focused primarily on concealing the scale of attack from the Germans. They successfully maintained secrecy when regrouping and moving forces between fronts and from reserve to the front. In nearly all instances 50 to 100 percent of the forces regrouped went undetected by German intelligence. Successful military deception operations during this final phase contributed to a German strategic disaster.[65]

Military deception was intensely studied in the Soviet military and academic spheres during and after the war. [66] The central theme that emerged was centralization. The ability of the General Staff to conduct military deception operations was dependent on the ability of lower units to master the extensive regulations and directives passed down to them. These regulations were slowly developed based on tactical and operational level experiences. As the military absorbed these lessons, the Soviet capability to conduct cohesive deceptions on a centralized basis increased.[67]

The operations analyzed in this case study are intended to represent each of the four phases of development. Thus the first operation analyzed, Rostov, took place during the first phase of development; the second campaign, Stalingrad, took place during the second phase, and so forth. This distribution is meant to provide as complete and succinct an idea as possible of Soviet military deception operations during World War II.

Hierarchical Culture

61. Ibid., p. 138.
62. Ibid., p. 275.
63. Ibid., p. 488.
64. Ibid., p. 413.
65. Ibid., p. 475.
66. Ibid., p. 481.
67. Ibid., p. 488.

Admiral Nikolay Gerasimovich Kuznetsov's memoir, found in *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* by Seweryn Bialer, describes the difficulties faced by subordinate officers in preparing to combat the impending German invasion. At this time Admiral Kuznetsov commanded the Soviet Navy, he describes how his decision to ready the fleet needed to be masked in order to avoid retribution:

> While feeling responsibility for the fleets and knowing what fatal consequences might ensue were they caught off guard, I could not express my viewpoint—which was contrary to the official one—even to my close subordinates. Under the pretext of training, we hastened to increase the readiness of the fleets, demanded the acceleration of various measures for strengthening the defence of [naval] bases and at the same time feared a "lowering of the boom" for displaying too much initiative.[68]

Speaking about Soviet preparedness more broadly, he states:

> His [Stalin's] condition communicated itself to those surrounding him, and they were unable to take the reins of command into their own hands. They were not accustomed to independent action and could only carry out the will of Stalin, who stood above them. That was the tragedy of those hours...[69]

These references to the chain-of-command and lack of decision-making authority demonstrate that lowering the decision threshold was delegitimized in discourse, even to the extent that expressing an opinion "contrary to the official one"[70] would be met with severe punishment.

November 1941: Rostov

Rostov was a mostly treeless region on the steppes of southern Russia. Preceding the Soviet counter-attack against the Germans, it was covered in fog and buffeted by cold rains. Not only were the Germans unused to such an environment, but their aerial reconnaissance was hampered. They had also overextended themselves in a bold drive toward Rostov.

Traveling at night, under strict light discipline across the open steppe, four Soviet divisions joined the two already in the area. All soldiers, vehicles, and materials were camouflaged. Offensive preparations were made in strict secrecy. Along the Germans' left flank,

68. Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin and His Generals: Soviet Military Memoirs of World War II* (Racine, WI: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), p. 191.
69. Ibid., p. 197.
70. Ibid., p. 191.

the Soviets built heavy fortifications to signal defensive intent. On November 18th, the Soviets launched a counterattack against the Germans.

The Germans had been unaware of Soviet troop movements and offensive preparations. Thus, they were unable to shift their forces and successfully stop the attack. One day prior to the attack, German intelligence had detected two divisions of the Soviet 37th Army. German intelligence material and journals express the surprise that the discovery of the rest of the 37th Army (four divisions more than had been accounted for) caused. The initial attack was then followed up by attacks from the Soviet 56th Separate Army. These attacks were further reinforced as they progressed, giving the Soviets numerical superiority.

By the end of November 1941 German forces had to evacuate the area north of Rostov, and they withdrew from Rostov by December 2nd. The military deception operation conducted in support of the counterattack against the Germans in Rostov, as well as weather and state of the German forces, contributed to the Soviets successfully taking the region and the area north of it as well. This success, however, was followed by a string of Soviet failures to carry out effective deception operations.[71]

November 1942: Stalingrad

The deception operation surrounding the Soviet offensive at Stalingrad in Southern Russia involved deception across multiple fronts. Orders for the preparation of the offensive and attendant deception measures were issued verbally by representatives of the Stavka directly to the commanders who would be carrying them out.[72] These orders guided the movement of 160,000 troops, as well as their resources, over the Don River and into Stalingrad proper, mostly without detection by German intelligence.

In preparation for this offensive, during the summer and fall of 1942, fronts in the Moscow region prepared active offensive operations. Following this, in mid-October 1942 fronts in Southern Russia engaged in defensive operations. Orders for these defensive operations in Southern Russia were written in detail and comparatively widely circulated. The primary aim of these operations was to convince the Germans that a winter offensive would be against the German Army Group Center located north of Stalingrad. This diversion would decrease German strength at Stalingrad.

While German attention was focused elsewhere, a directive dated October 25th to Soviet commanders along the Don River and in the Southwestern Fronts instructed the implementation of the following deception measures: troops should march only at night and rest in concealment during the day, movements should be covered by aviation and anti-aircraft units, and loudspeakers should be used to cover engine noise. Additionally, along the Don River 22 bridges were constructed, five of them being false. The Germans successfully bombed those five. False concentrations of artillery and tanks were also simulated. Leading up to the offensive, on 19

71. Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War*, p. 83.
72. Ibid., p. 144.

November the Soviets used smoke cover units crossing the Don. At this time, some units moved in the opposite direction to further confuse the Germans.

The Soviet deception resulted in the movement of twelve divisions to Army Group Center and decreased German resistance at Stalingrad. A German directive dated November 29th acknowledges the effective concealment of Soviet units taking part in the offensive against Stalingrad.[73] It further notes that the Soviets have a capacity for concealing preparation for the offense. The Germans had remained confident that the Soviets did not have enough troops to launch an attack at Stalingrad, therefore the Soviet success was primarily in masking the scale of the offensive. This represented a turning point in the war for the Soviets.

January 1944: Leningrad-Novgorod

This operation freed Leningrad, now Saint-Petersburg, from a nearly 900-day German siege. Similar to the previous military deception operations, the Soviets formed false concentrations of forces to direct attention away from the real offensive sector. The Soviet attack would come from both the Oranienbaum bridgehead, west of Leningrad, and from Novgorod on January 14th.

Reinforcements to the Oranienbaum bridgehead and to Soviet troops east of Novgorod were effectively masked.[74] Therefore, the Germans remained confident that a Soviet attack would not come from these locations, as they appeared not to have enough troops to conduct a significant offensive operation. Instead, they assumed that an attack would come, as previous attacks had, from the region east of Leningrad between Mga and Chudovo. Taking advantage of this assumption, the Soviets simulated troop concentrations and attack preparations in this area. These were animated by reserve troops, fake communications networks, and concentrations of fighter aircraft. While reconnaissance was conducted across the entire front, it was particularly concentrated on these areas as well. The Soviets additionally bombed the German positions across from these simulated attack areas.

This resulted in German reinforcements being sent to the false attack sectors. When the Soviets attacked simultaneously toward Novgorod and from the Oranienbaum bridgehead, the Germans did not have adequate troops to hold their line. By January 14th, the Soviet attacks had collapsed the German fronts and forced them to withdraw from the Leningrad region.

January 1945: Vistula-Oder

This operation was an offensive drive through Poland toward Berlin. On January 12th, the Soviets attacked from the Sandomierz bridgehead and two days later they attacked from the Pulary and Magnushev bridgeheads, south of Warsaw. The Germans knew this attack was

73. Ibid., pp. 137–151.
74. Ibid., pp. 282–289.

imminent, but throughout the winter of 1945, they continually predicted inaccurate start dates. The Germans also knew that any attack would have to come across the Vistula River or from the area south of it, due to the geographic constraints the Soviets faced.

The Soviet deception operation centered on hiding the scale and timing of the offensive. To this end, it aimed to confuse the Germans as to which sector the attack would be launched from. The Soviets created simulated force concentrations north of Warsaw and near Joselow. This simulated activity was coordinated with the real regrouping and concentrating taking place in the Magnushev and Pulary bridgeheads. To assist in secretly concentrating at these bridgeheads, the Soviets built multiple bridges across the Vistula River. Two of these bridges reached into a forested area: these brought troops and equipment to the bridgeheads. Another was in an open area, and used for return traffic. Troops and equipment were moved at night, in portions which could be camouflaged by morning. Simulations were also conducted on the fronts' left flank to conceal the concentration on the Sandomierz bridgehead. False artillery positions were constructed on the Soviet's right flank to distract from the buildup. Attesting to their believability, German artillery struck at these false positions.

In each of the attack sectors, troops busied themselves with defensive work. Equipment coming in was camouflaged while being transported, unloaded at night, and camouflaged again. Offensive preparations in these sectors were done only at night. Orders regarding the attack were given only to those that would be directly carrying them out, and at the last moment possible. Soldiers were given their orders only a few hours prior to the attack.[75]

This military deception operation allowed the Soviets to conceal the scale of their offensive, and in some areas the direction of attack. The Soviets were then able to move across Poland and significantly decrease the German military's ability to continue fighting.

Discussion

In this case study, hierarchical culture is determined to exist and the cohesion of military deception operations increase over time. There are at least two possible conclusions which could be drawn from this. The first is that hierarchical culture does not influence cohesion, as it changed while the existence of hierarchical culture did not. The second is that hierarchical culture enabled and encouraged the development of cohesion, in tandem with experience gained over the course of the war.

One limitation of this analysis is that the Soviet operations considered are exclusively offensive. The Germans reacted to Soviet simulations of concentrations or offensive intent, but these troop movements were often minimal. A reaction to the false reality that a number of troops are not present in an area and are not preparing an offensive is primarily to do nothing. This is somewhat of an obstacle to analysis as it is more difficult to attribute inaction to a cause than action. Bearing this in mind, based on German reactions to false concentrations of Soviet

75. Ibid., pp. 413–440.

troops, it is likely that they did not react to actual concentrations of troops and offensive preparations due to a cohesive deception operation.

1979 - 1989: Soviet-Afghan War

The civil war in Afghanistan was provoked by a series of coups beginning in 1973 with the overthrow of the monarchy. In 1978, the leader of the Afghan state Mohammed Daud was assassinated and the Marxist People's Democratic Party under the leadership of Nur Mohammed Taraki took power.[76] In the following year, two more coups resulted in the instatement of Babrak Karmal as president.[77] On 18 March 1979, then-president of Afghanistan, Nur Muhammad Taraki, admitted to the Soviet Politburo that the government in Afghanistan had very limited domestic support. One Afghan statesman, Hafizullah Amin, "..bluntly expressed the view that the USSR should deploy troops in Herat,"[78] where the 17th division of the Afghan army had virtually collapsed.[79] On 27 December 1979, a radio transmission coming from inside the Soviet Union, but on the Kabul radio frequency, featured Babrak Karmal announcing his leadership of a new government and the ousting of Amin and Taraki's regime by the "People's Democratic Party and the Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan." Soviet troops assaulted Amin's residence, Amin resultantly died, and was replaced by Karmal.[80]

The Soviet government did not acknowledge sending conscripts (usually between 18 and 20 years old) to fight in Afghanistan's civil war, until *glasnost* in the mid-1980s. Before *glasnost* the government reported that soldiers were helping to build a socialist state in Afghanistan by planting trees or building hospitals and schools. This was referred to as fulfilling an 'international duty.' Deaths went officially unexplained and the phrase 'Died fulfilling his international duty,' came to mean Killed-in-Action.[81]

Initially, there was some hesitation on the part of the Soviets over whether to intervene in Afghanistan to support the government. Yuri Andropov, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, said in a meeting of the Politburo:

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76. "Afghanistan profile - Timeline," *BBC News,* September 04, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12024253.
77. Svetlana Alexievich and Larry Heinemann, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War,* trans., Julia Whitby and Robin Whitby (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. xv.
78. "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan," March 17, 1979, Working Transcript, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center, p. 12, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113260
79. "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan," p. 1,
80. "Predicting the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: The Intelligence Community's Record," *Central Intelligence Agency Center for the Study of Intelligence,* (April 2007), https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/predicting-the-soviet-invasion-of-afghanistan-the-intelligence-communitys-record/predicting-the-soviet-invasion-of-afghanistan-the-intelligence-communitys-record.html
81. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War,* p. x.

> It is completely clear to us that Afghanistan is not ready at this time to resolve all of the issues it faces through socialism. The economy is backward, the Islamic religion predominates, and nearly all of the rural population is illiterate. We know Lenin's teaching about a revolutionary situation. Whatever situation we are talking about in Afghanistan, it is not that type of situation.[82]

There were further concerns about the impact of invasion on the Soviet Union's international position and relations with other powers. However, there were perceived threats to security stemming from the possibility of Iran or Pakistan developing nuclear capability, an alleged attempt by the CIA to establish a new Ottoman Empire, and the possible establishment of an opposing regime in Afghanistan.[83]

Hierarchical Culture

The highest circle within the Politburo at the time—Yuri Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party, Andrei Gromyko, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Suslov, Politburo Member and former Head of the Department of Relations with Foreign Communist Parties, and Dmitry Ustinov, the Minister of Defense—chose to invade Afghanistan in December 1979.[84] Ustinov told the Chief of General Staff, Nikolai Ogarkov, to prepare 75,000 troops. When Ogarkov protested that this was not enough troops to stabilize the situation, he was sharply criticized by Ustinov saying: "Are you going to teach the Politburo? Your only duty is to carry out orders..."[85] Decision making within the Politburo has been described by Alexander Lyakhovsky, a Major General in the Soviet Army and former aide to the Soviet General of the Army Valentin Varennikov. In his account he states:

> In those times nobody spoke "against" [it]. Every Politburo member knew how a disagreement with the opinion of General Secretary would be received, and therefore all proposals were "received with unanimous approval." The principle of collective coverup ruled the day.[86]

Lyakhovsky additionally describes information transfer within the Soviet chain-of-command at the time:

82. "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan," p. 11.
83. "Alexander Lyakhovskiy's Account of the Decision of the CC CPSU Decision to Send Troops to Afghanistan," December, 1979, trans. Svetlana Savranskaya, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Center, pp. 109–112, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115531.
84. Ibid., pp. 109–112.
85. Ibid., p. 111.
86. Ibid., p. 112.

> Actually the information from various sources was very contradictory and the solutions proposed were polar opposites. Moreover there was an unwritten rule – send primarily that information which would suit the leadership, that was in harmony with its positions, and "guess" the information which corresponded to the leaders' notions about one or another issue and confirmed their prescience. Often the initial information sifted through the "strainer" of various echelons changed to the point of being unrecognizable.[87]

A secondary report on the Soviet-Afghanistan war also claims that the Soviet military culture showed "unusually high levels of authoritarianism" at this time.[88]

Discourse within the Politburo clearly makes references to relative place in the chain-of-command and lack of decision-making authority. Ustinov's rebuke of Ogarkov demonstrates how Ogarkov's attempt to lower the decision threshold, by suggesting an alternative course of action, was delegitimized. Further, Lyakhovsky's description of information transfer and decision making shows how deeply this understanding was entrenched in discourse.

June 1979: Invasion

The Soviet troops that assaulted Amin's residence wore Afghan Army uniforms. Simultaneously, Soviet troops were seen taking control of important Afghan political and military facilities, as well as the Kabul radio station. [89] The new government then requested the Soviet assistance that was already entering Afghanistan. This series of events definitively overturned the perception that this was an operation only to support the existing government and to increase security.

Beginning in summer of 1979, Soviet troops discreetly entered Afghanistan. They usually entered in battalion-sized units and rarely as recognizable combat troops. The earliest accessible Soviet record of these quiet deployments is dated 28 June 1979. It discusses the deployment of an airborne battalion to Afghanistan, camouflaged as aircraft service and maintenance personnel. This document also discusses the insertion of KGB and GRU detachments, the former disguised as embassy service personnel.[90]

The military deception operation conducted in the latter half of 1979 seems to have successfully concealed Soviet troops' movements and intentions. Most US intelligence officials continued to hold that troops were not indicative of an impending Soviet invasion and that instead they were for security purposes.[91] The full-scale invasion of Afghanistan on December

87. Lyakhovskiy, *Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1979,* p. 20.
88. Stephen J. Blank, "Afghanistan and Beyond: Reflections on the Future of Warfare," *Small Wars and Insurgencies,* Vol. 3:3 (November 1992), p. 12.
89. "Predicting the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: The Intelligence Community's Record"
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.

27th and 28th seemed to take the American, Pakistani, and Afghani governments by surprise.[92] However, factors internal to these governments may have influenced the level of surprise they demonstrated, thus exaggerating the success of the deception operation.

Discussion

In this case study, the military deception operation accompanying the invasion of Afghanistan was cohesive and hierarchical culture existed. This indicates that hierarchical culture could have led to a cohesive deception operation. Unfortunately, there is no readily available evidence that continued deception operations in support of the subsequent campaign in Afghanistan occurred or were attempted. Failure to attempt further deception operations seems to contradict Soviet doctrine at the time, which highlighted the importance of deception operations and prescribed that those deemed significant be placed under the direct command of the General Staff.[93] This lack of evidence regarding deception in the majority of the conflict limits analysis of the impact of hierarchical culture on cohesion as the conflict progressed.

2014 - 2017: Conflict in Ukraine

In February 2014, Crimea was guarded by the Ukrainian Navy's coastal defense brigade, two marine battalions, a rocket artillery brigade, and a tactical air force group. The Russian annexation of the peninsula started late that month. Medals issued by the Russian government 'For the Return of Crimea' were stamped with the date February 20th 2014, potentially dating the intended start of the annexation.[94] By February 22nd, Anapa Airfield had become the main logistics base for lifting Russian troops and supplies into Crimea. A day later, the citizens of Crimea elected a popular mayor and decided to disregard Kiev's decrees.

As protesters increasingly called for separation from Ukraine, checkpoints onto the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine were established, and self-defense militias began to form in large towns. Russian special operations forces seized the Crimean Parliament on February 27th, and Belbek Airfield was taken shortly thereafter. Russian troops continued to flow into Crimea and began establishing blockades of Ukrainian military bases. Most of these bases surrendered

92. Blank, "Afghanistan and Beyond: Reflections on the Future of Warfare," p. 8.
93. Ghulam Dastagir Wardak, *Voroshilov Lectures*, Vol. 1, Materials From the Soviet General Staff Academy, ed., Graham Hall Turbiville (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989), pp. 170 –175.
94. Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine,* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 2014).

peacefully following several days of blockade.[95] By March 25, 2014 Russia had established military control over the peninsula.[96]

Following the annexation of Crimea into the Russian Federation, anti-Kiev rebellions broke out in the eastern region of Donbas. By August 2014, Spetsnaz-GRU operators had 3 to 4 units of approximately 250 to 300 soldiers each, in Donbas. These units engaged in irregular warfare, trained local separatists, and provided intelligence. By October 2015, a joint coordination center had been established to aid GRU and FSB cooperation in the region.[97]

Hierarchical Culture

Recovering in a hospital in Donetsk, one of the special operations soldiers involved in the invasion of the Donbas region, Dorzhi Batomkunuev, described part of his experience fighting in Ukraine in an interview with Novaya Gazeta:

> All our commanders are great. Not a single one chickened out. *We were all equals,* whether you are a colonel or a private. Because we fight side by side. My battalion's commander… He is in Rostov now, got burned in a tank, just like me… my battalion commander, a colonel. This was about [February] 12th-14th, one of those days. We had to liberate a village. I don't remember the name… we took the village back… it was great... (Emphasis Added)[98]

Batomkunuev's comment, 'We were all equals,' implies relative place in the chain-of-command had diminished importance. Though there are no references to decision-making authority, this could indicate that lowering the decision threshold was not delegitimized.

2014 - 2017: Crimean Annexation

The prior stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Crimea eased the kinetic and the information campaign for Crimea, as the fleet hosted a number of resources to influence public opinion. It bore connections to a number of cultural socio-political organizations in Crimea, for example the Russian Orthodox Church in which a number of the priests are former officers. The fleet also hosted a component of Moscow State University. In addition to being the only

95. Anton Lavrov, "Russian Again, The Military Operation for Crimea," in Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, eds., *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine,* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 2015), pp. 248–269.
96. Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*.
97. Tor Bukkvoll, "Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas," *Parameters,* Vol. 46:2 (Summer 2016), pp. 17–21.
98. "The Story of a Russian Soldier's War in Ukraine: 'We All Knew What We Had to Do and What Could Happen,'" *Euromaidan Press*, March 2, 2015, http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/03/02/the-story-of-a-russian-soldiers-war-in-ukraine-we-all-knew-what-we-had-to-do-and-what-could-happen/.

journalism school in Crimea as of 2011, Roslycky describes how this component of the school was utilized:

> ...teaching at the MSU-BSB – often conducted by former Russian military and intelligence officers – is pro-Russian in its emphasis (Maigre 2009, 16), and it encourages narratives undermining Kyiv's soft power and collective identity in Crimea. Consequently, as MSU-BSB graduates take on administrative and professional positions in Crimea, Kyiv's effective national policy implementation in the Autonomous Crimean Republic is severely undermined by the MSU-BSB.[99]

An analysis released by US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) claims that *Russia Today*, "...gives Moscow the commanding heights of the information war and a strong voice wherever its signal is broadcast and not deliberately blocked."[100] *Russia Today* also provides some of the highest quality programming in the region, providing them with additional viewers. In social media networks, Russia supported journalists, bloggers, and individuals who propagated pro-Russian narratives. Pro-Russian sites would also mimic anti-Russian media in order to spread confusion and influence opinions.[101]

The military deception operation directly preceding the annexation began with cyber attacks both from Russia and from actors in Ukraine. The attacks shut down telecommunications infrastructure, disabled major Ukrainian websites, and jammed important Ukrainian official's mobile phones.[102] Within Crimea, landline, Internet, and mobile services were almost entirely inoperable at the time of the invasion. This prompted Ukrainian hacktivist groups, such as Cyber Berkut and Ukraine Anonymous, to attack Russian government sites and Russia Today.[103] Oher Ukrainian groups aligned with Russia conducted distributed denial of service attacks and defacements against Ukrainian and NATO webpages and tried to influence the Ukrainian parliamentary elections through disrupting Ukraine's Central Election Commission network. In addition to cyber attacks, Russia also conducted cyber espionage against the computers and networks of journalists.[104] This served to distract Kiev's attention from Crimea and to prepare for the invasion of the Donbas region. Throughout the annexation, the Russian government continuously denied the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called such suggestions "complete nonsense,"[105] and Putin stated that the armed men in Crimea were civil defense forces.

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99. Lada L. Roslycky, "Russia's smart power in Crimea: sowing the seeds of trust," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies,* Vol. 11:3 (2011), p. 304, doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2011.590313.
100. *Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014,* p. 49.
101. Emilio J. Iasiello, "Russia's Improved Information Operations: From Georgia to Crimea," *Parameters,* Vol. 47:2 (2017), pp. 51–63.
102. Iasiello, "Russia's Improved Information Operations: From Georgia to Crimea," 51–63.
103. *Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014*.
104. Maier, *A Little Masquerade: Russia's Evolving Employment of Maskirovka*, p. 40.
105. Ibid., p. 39.

This deception operation partially concealed Russian troop movements and intentions in Crimea. Western powers were slow to respond to the annexation and did not intervene directly, in part due to the success of the deception. However, other factors, such as the difficulty of collective action, also likely shaped responses to the annexation of Crimea.

March 2014 - 2017: Conflict in the Donbas Region

During this conflict, Russia quietly added military specialists and officers to Ukrainian separatist units in Eastern Ukraine and sent Russian troops and equipment to the region. In order to distract from these movements, aid convoys in other locations simultaneously began to move into Ukraine from Russia.[106] Russian political leaders, state media, government social media trolls, and government agents conducted a relatively cohesive deception operation.[107] The Russian government maintained the narrative that active duty Russian troops were not being sent to fight in the Donbas region. Instead, they claim Russian soldiers discovered in Ukraine have gone there on holiday or as patriotic volunteers.

These claims made by the government are directly contradicted by interviews with Russian soldiers in Ukraine who state that they are on active duty.[108] The military, in contrast with governmental organizations, has been accused by some analysts of poor operational security.[109] Based on the unmasking of Russian troops in Ukraine by local news media interviews and soldiers posting photos of themselves in Ukraine on social media, the cohesion of the deception by the government broke down at the tactical level.

The deception operation surrounding Russian troop movements and intentions in the Donbass region could have contributed to the lack of an initial direct response by Western powers. However, as this conflict remains ongoing at the time of this writing it is unclear what further actions the West will take.

Discussion

In this case study, the cohesion of the deception operation failed at the tactical level when hierarchical culture did not exist at the operational level. This could indicate that a lack of hierarchical culture at one level of a military deception led to a breakdown of cohesion at a different level. However, the analysis of hierarchical culture for this time period is limited by the lack of available primary documents containing relevance discourse.

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106. Ibid., p. 39–46.
107. John R. Haines, *Russia's Use of Disinformation in the Ukraine Conflict*, (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 2015), p. 1, https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/02/russias-use-of-disinformation-in-the-ukraine-conflict/.
108. "Novaya Gazeta interview with Russian soldiers captured in Ukraine: English translation," *Novaya Gazeta*, May 22, 2015, https://www.unian.info/politics/1080947-novaya-gazeta-interview-with-russian-soldiers-captured-in-ukraine-english-translation.html.
109. Maier, *A Little Masquerade: Russia's Evolving Employment of Maskirovka*, p. 44.

While it is possible that Batomkunuev's statement, 'We were all equals,'[110] reveals a dramatic shift in hierarchical culture across the Russian military, it seems more likely a result of his position as a special forces contract soldier who willingly went to Ukraine. He describes his motivation to go to Ukraine and the strong convictions his unit held regarding their purpose in Ukraine,

> Back when I was in Peschanka, doing training in Chita, we had basic military training, they switched the TV on. There were news. And just then in Odesa… people got burnt. Right then… we felt sick. There was that feeling… just… You can't do this. This is inhuman, this isn't right. And that I was… actually, you can't bring draftees here. You just can't. But I still went. I had a feeling… not duty, but justice. I saw lots of people get killed here. They behave outrageously. I get the same feeling of justice. [111]

As a special forces soldier, he may have also had close working relationships with officers. This sub-culture could have superseded hierarchical culture in the special forces units in Ukraine.

Conclusion

By examining discourse and military deception operations from World War II, the Soviet-Afghan War, and the conflict in Ukraine, we find that hierarchical culture likely aided in the development and conduct of cohesive military deception operations. The Soviet experience in World War II demonstrates that hierarchical culture may also impact the process of developing military deception capability, not only shape the outcome of operations.

This work shows that in the context of foreign policy toward Russia, not only does one need to consider advances in high technology for traditional military applications but also innovations and uses below the level of declared war, i.e., what is referred to as hybrid warfare, the grey zone, non-linear war, or war below the line (of the Gerasimov "doctrine"). These terms have been taken to mean literally the use of subversion, information warfare, and covert activities to prepare the battlefield before intervention, or what George Kennan called political war: "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives."[112]

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110. "The Story of a Russian Soldier's War in Ukraine: 'We All Knew What We Had to Do and What Could Happen'"
111. Ibid.
112. "George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare," April 30, 1948, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed to CWIHP by A. Ross Johnson. Cited in his book Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, Ch1 n4 – NARA release courtesy of Douglas Selvage. Redacted final draft of a memorandum dated May 4, 1948, and published with additional redactions as document 269, FRUS, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment.
https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320

The line between competition and conflict is increasingly blurry, and the domains in which political war may be waged have expanded. Understanding the role of strategic culture in military deception operations is an important part of 21st Century geopolitics.